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COMMUNICATION ARTS BOOKS



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HOW TO GET INTO
TELEVISION AND RADIO

By MERRILL E. JOELS

HASTINGS HOUSE, PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

PN
1992
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A3
J6

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TO MY WIFE
MARION

WHO NEVER LET ME WALK ALONE

Foreword

ACTING IS A BUSINESS provides a factual, concise book for beginners in the acting end of the television industry. To my knowledge, it is the only publication which is based on practical experience by one of the leading working actors in the profession. It covers a multitude of facts which a newcomer could only learn himself after months of experience. I think there is a great need for a work of this kind and it should prove extremely useful to anyone contemplating entering television. It also brings out many points which actors already working will find helpful.

As a network Casting Director, I heartily endorse the project. If I may make a suggestion, I think it should be required reading for every newcomer in the field. It will save him much time and disappointment.

Joan MacDonald

Casting Director

American Broadcasting Company

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Introduction

This is a semi-autobiographical guide book; by employing the first person singular, it will be like talking personally to each of you. It is autobiographical because, through my personal experiences, you will learn many sidelights on show business and its people. It is a guide book, because I have found that there is a definite need for a compact, businesslike outline to help anyone wishing to become a performer in the entertainment field.

There is a general belief that actors as “artists” have little or no business sense. Unfortunately, this often seems to be true. Most aspirants who attempt to enter this field lack the understanding that it is a business as well as an art. Acting is, of course, an art;

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but the problem is to be able to *display* your art successfully. Therefore, one must procure work in a business-like way.

Let me make it very clear that the intent of this book is neither to encourage nor discourage anyone who feels that his life's work is as a performer in television and radio. It is, as Joe Friday of *Dragnet* would say, to present: "Just the facts, ma'am (or sir)." These "facts" are what impelled me to write. If, ten years ago when I came to New York, I knew even part of what I know now . . . it would have saved me many months, perhaps years, of floundering mistakes, and consequently would have saved many thousands of dollars. It is my hope that my experience will do that for you.

We must assume that you have a basic talent. If you don't, it will not take long to find it out. Even though the primary purpose of this book is to help the novice or newcomer, experienced professionals will find many ideas that are helpful and inspirational. Although it is written primarily about New York, the basic principles outlined can be applied to Chicago, Los Angeles or Squeedunk.

With the further development of television and the opening of hundreds of new stations throughout the country, there will be myriad opportunities for thousands of people to get into the field. If you were to come to me personally and ask my advice, this is what I would tell you:

INTRODUCTION

“Stay Home. Using the same principles taught in this book, start your career at your local radio or TV station, or one in the closest metropolis to your home town. Work and develop your talent until it becomes outstanding. As you progress, you will find that opportunity will come to you. The ‘better mouse trap’ is not just a fable. As your reputation grows locally, you will be discovered by someone who can use your ability. Real talent can’t be hidden under a bushel for long.”

If you still feel you’d rather tackle the “Big City,” the drama center, whether it be East Coast or West . . . come ahead! But first, study this book carefully, so that you’ll have an understanding of the future. All you need are talent, patience, “guts”, faith and “Creative Imagination.” As an actor, you know that imagination is one of the tools of your trade. Putting the imagination to work positively, in a business way, is what I call “Creative Imagination.”

There are many factors that determine the length of time it takes to become a success. By “success” I am referring to the ability to make a decent livelihood. It may be determined by your “type”, “personality”, “ability”, “experience”, or perhaps what is commonly referred to as “the breaks.” I believe we create our own “breaks” as a result of the effort we put into our careers.

So . . . let’s go into business!

What product do you have to offer? Yourself, of

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course. This includes your own brand of personality and your exclusive ability. There is only one of YOU. And this is the basis on which you must build.

Let's suppose you are going into some other business . . . selling shoes, for instance. How would you go about it? Let's do it together.

First, we'd have to make a careful selection of location. Then we'd rent a store. We'd clean it and paint it and fix it up with the most modern equipment. We'd put a neon sign over the door. We'd take in the smartest line of shoes and accessories we could find. We'd advertise in the local papers and distribute handbills in all the surrounding mailboxes. Then, we'd wait for the customers to come in. Even after they started coming, we'd have to sell them and convince them that our shoes were better values than those of our competitors.

Now just apply all this to your product, and you'll have an idea of the work ahead of us.

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CHAPTER 1

Personal Background

EVERY ARTIST dreams of some day hitting the “Big Time.” Whether it’s New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, there’s the desire to tackle the “Big City” and its golden opportunities. Every autumn finds a flood of new hopefuls washed up on the shores of the “Land of Hope.” Their bags are packed with hope, their hearts with ambition, their minds with determination and their pockets . . . well, that depends. Each brings his individual background, experience, type, age and personality. Some come in the bloom of their youth, others don’t take the plunge until their middle years.

My tussle with the tentacles of the talent buyers began in 1932, the heart of the Depression. Circumstances had brought us from Hartford, Connecticut, to New York, where my Dad was to open a new business.

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This was my opportunity to realize my dream . . . I thought. But the time was not very propitious. There was one play running on Broadway that summer, and half a dozen stock companies were operating in the eastern part of the country. But I was very young and very determined. I made all the rounds and looked everywhere, to no avail. One day, as I passed a theater, I noticed a sign which read:

GROUP THEATER.

I had heard of it, but actually knew very little about the organization. Climbing five flights of stairs, I found myself in a small ante-room. On the door-jamb hung a little typewritten notice marked "Directors." I glanced at it, and when a young lady came out and asked me whom I wished to see, I gave the first name on the list, Cheryl Crawford. When informed that she wasn't in, I glanced quickly at the list and asked to see the second person, Mr. Lee Strassberg. She asked me to wait. Presently, the door opened and a small, interesting man spoke to me.

STRASSBERG: You want to see me?

ME: Are *you* Mr. Strassberg?

STRASSBERG: Yes. What can I do for you?

ME: Mr. Strassberg, I want to join the Group Theater.

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STRASSBERG: (Looking at me for a long moment)
Come in, young man.

ME: (As we enter a tiny office) Thank
you.

STRASSBERG: So you want to join the Group
Theater. Why?

ME: Because I want to act.

STRASSBERG: What have you done in the theater?

ME: Well, I've been a member of a Little
Theater group in Hartford. I was in
High School plays. I worked on a
local radio station.

STRASSBERG: Tell me, what method of acting do
you use?

ME: Method? Is there a method?

STRASSBERG: Have you studied Stanislavsky, Bole-
slavski or Komisarjevsky?

ME: (He could have been mentioning
brands of Russian borscht, for all I
knew) No.

STRASSBERG: How do you know you are qualified
to be in the theater?

ME: Because I feel I have it here (point-
ing dramatically to my heart). And
besides, did Helen Hayes or Kath-
erine Cornell study these . . . these
people you mentioned?

STRASSBERG: Are *you* a genius?

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ME: (Feebly) No.

STRASSBERG: Tell me . . . What's a jog?

ME: A jog? A jog? I don't know.

Then he began to interrogate me about theater in its every phase. I kept feeling smaller and smaller. As he questioned me, I realized how unqualified I was for the very career I wanted most. Finally, he said to me:

STRASSBERG: Young man, on the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue is the New York Public Library. In it you will find almost every book on the theater, and it's free. If you're really sincere, go . . . study . . . learn . . . Then come back to see me in three years, and I'll talk to you.

I walked down those five flights crying—. I had gone up there five feet, six inches tall, but I felt small enough to crawl under the door sill. I said to myself: "So, *you* want to be an actor. You, who know nothing about the craft. What have you got to offer? Stop kidding yourself." Then and there, I determined to follow Mr. Strassberg's advice. I went to the Library and began studying every book I could find on the subject. I am still studying.

In the course of my reading, I came across books on the Pasadena Playhouse, the Dallas Little Theater and the Cleveland Playhouse. The next Spring, when

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we returned to Hartford, I was determined to form my own theater and really learn my business. In September of 1933 I founded the Mark Twain Masquers, Inc., which is still in existence and is presently one of the most successful community groups in New England. Before I left to enter the Army in November of 1942, I had produced or acted in fifty-five full-length plays and countless one-acters. I had worked at every job that could be done in the theater. I had no intentions of trying to get into the "Big Time" again.

This story has been told for a purpose. It demonstrates that if you are not fully prepared, you don't stand much of a chance; also, that one can find one's niche in one's home town and make it both gratifying and remunerative. As a result of my experience with the Masquers, I did radio work, had a disc-jockey show broadcast from one of the leading department stores, directed and lectured to other groups, produced shows for Army and Navy benefits, worked at local theaters and found many other opportunities for growth in my desired field.

During my Army tenure, I met and married a New York girl and upon my discharge in 1945, there arose the question of returning to Hartford or making another attempt to break into the "Big Time," in New York. By this time, I felt that I knew most of the answers to Mr. Strassberg's questions; so we decided to give it a try.

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Soon I learned another lesson. The only value of out-of-town experience is exactly that. Somehow, it seems that only what you've done "on Broadway," over the networks and—in a few rare cases—what work you have had with certain of the better off-Broadway theaters, will count in the balance. In most instances your out-of-town experience may be considered "amateur." But, it is certainly not wasted. It is part of your ammunition in fighting the "Battle of the Big Time."

When you first arrive in the "Big City," you will hear many rumors. People in the business will talk about "The Inner Circle," "The Wall," "The Iron Door," and mention other phrases, all of which mean that it's impossible for a newcomer to break through. *Don't you believe it!* If you work hard enough, you'll find an opening in that circle, you'll get a boost over that wall or your foot in the Iron Door. The one purpose of this book is to help you do it.

The more background and experience you have, the easier it will be to find your rightful place. When I made the decision to try again, I really wanted to get into the theater . . . but I had acquired the responsibility of a wife and child, I still didn't know how to go about it, and I couldn't hold out financially until the "breaks" should come. I turned to the next best medium I knew—radio. Television didn't actually offer much work to actors until 1946-1947. I concentrated on obtaining a foothold in radio. I did everything wrong. I

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used the wrong approach, and the wrong audition material. I was impatient, anxious, insecure and woefully uninformed. My only break was that I was a veteran. Because of this, I was extended the courtesy of auditions. I flunked more of them than I passed. My wife and I will never forget the day I came home after learning that I had flunked three important auditions.

I learned the hard way. I have since worked for almost every director whose audition I did not pass. You'll understand the reason, by the time you've finished this book.

CHAPTER 2

Approach to Radio and Television

ALTHOUGH THIS book is primarily for the artist who wishes to enter the field of television, I for one am not moaning over the "corpse" of radio. I believe that radio can not lose its importance in American life. I cite the case of the phonograph record at the advent of radio. I recall that people were giving away their "Victrolas" and discarding records which would be collectors' items today. Now the phonograph record business is greater than ever.

After the thrill and novelty of color television is over, people will still turn to their radios, with which they can create and visualize in their own imaginations. I believe that the actor should continue to develop his radio technique.

Radio acting is an art in itself, and pays well. The

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actor must create *vocally* everything which television does *visually*. To be a successful radio actor requires many years of work. Experience is usually obtained at the local radio station. Network radio requires a great deal more finesse and technique. There are schools and teachers to help you acquire this knowledge (see Appendix). A thorough knowledge of dialects and doubling is essential, particularly for character people. Proper preparation and selection of audition material is important. Radio technique is valuable in correlated fields which are mentioned in the chapter on "Development of Earning Power."

Television is the newest and biggest entertainment medium and the one in which most artists are interested in establishing themselves . . . and for a good many reasons. First, it pays well; secondly, it's the greatest of all show-cases; thirdly, it has the largest audience; finally, it combines the talents required in all other media.

Its requirements, however, are more stringent than in most fields. It combines movements of the stage, camera work of the screen and the intimate technique of delivery used in radio. What's more, all this is called for without the length of rehearsal time of theater, the interrupted sequences of film work or the static concentration of radio. Television is restricted by a concentrated capsule of *time*. For the actor this means

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fast study, few rehearsals, infinite hours of sitting around, the strain of camera-day, the restriction of movement, the annoyance of bright lighting and the feeling of being "on the spot" every moment of air time.

With no intention of humor, you'll find that the television picture is changing all the time. A greater number of shows are being put on film and color television is rapidly becoming an active threat to black-and-white. There is the problem of rising costs, which results in fewer sponsors, smaller casts, elimination of actors on commercials by use of animated cartoons, shows not using actors, and—the "star system."

For the actor, one of the prime requisites is a theater background. Because television is just beginning to invade the local scene, the aspirant has no place to learn his craft as in radio. Therefore, when you decide to come to the "Big City" to enter television, be prepared to start as an "extra," and work your way up.

Your first step is to prepare a "composite." This is important, because it is your "merchandise display." Let's go back to our discussion of "Building a Business," noted in the Introduction. You've picked your location, the "Big City." You're preparing to open your store. To display your wares, you're going to need fixtures. That's where the composite comes in. A good composite is one of your most business-wise and valuable assets, since most casting is done from pictures.

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Here are some important suggestions on how to create a composite that “sells.”

A composite consists of four or more photographs, arranged on a single 8 x 10 sheet. Up to nine different poses can be used, provided you do not create a “crowded” effect. The purpose is to “display” you in varying moods and characters. Before you have the pictures taken, make certain that the photographer is familiar with theatrical requirements. Then, plan each shot. If you’re a leading man or woman, don’t try to look more glamorous than you are. Honest pictures sell you faster. Plan each pose down to the last detail. *Don’t* have four head-shots in different positions with just changes of expression. Let each picture tell a story; have it look like an action-shot taken from a scene you were playing. You may even include actual scenes from shows you’ve done recently. Use other people as part of the action, if you wish, but make sure that only you are “featured.” Plan proper wardrobe and props for each character. Explain the scene and mood to the photographer. For character work, show scenes in roles that are the type you want to play. Don’t expect directors to call you for parts in which they can’t visualize you. Casting people see you only in those roles suggested by your actual appearance or the pictures you give them. Include a “straight” shot (you “as is”, so to speak) but also display your versatility. Composites should be changed every two years.

"A VOICE, DIALECT AND CHARACTERIZATION FOR EVERY PICTURE"

ACTOR _____ ANNOUNCER _____ NARRATOR _____

HEIGHT - 5' 7"

WEIGHT - 155

HAIR - DARK BROWN

EYES - DARK BROWN

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REFERENCE: Here are some of the people I worked with in the past year:

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CHARLES BASCH

BERT BELL

ANDERSON BRISCOE

FRY C. BROWN

AL CAMERATI

BERT CHAMPLAIN

HARD CLEMMER

JOEL DATLOWE

FRY DENKER

DEVORE

RA DOONAR

ERMAN DRYER

MAN ENGLE

MAN FELTON

FOSHKO

FRANK

BRAD FRANKLIN

RALPH BELL FULLER

DALE GARRICK

MEL GOODMAN

PAUL GUMBINER

MARY HARRIS

DON HASTIE

ROBERT HODGES

ROLAND HOWE, JR.

JACK HURDLE

ERIC JENSSEN

WILLIAM KALAND

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HECKY KRASNOW

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DAN LEVIN

SIDNEY LUMET

ARLENE LUNNY

KAY MacMAHON

ROBERT DALE MARTIN

LUCILLE MASON

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WILLIAM MOGLE

JOE MORONE

JACK MURPHY

PAT MURPHY

MARY NORTHRUP

AL PALLADINO

TONY PAN

STANLEY POSS

DORIS QUINLAN

MAX RICHARD

BOB ROMM

MARVIN ROTHENBERG

JACK RUBIN

SHOLOM RUBINSTEIN

WALTER RUCHERSBERG

HARRY RUDDER

FRANCES SCOTT

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E. J. SPIRO

LELA SWIFT

ROBERT E. TAYLOR

ETHEL TERRY

JEAN THOMAS

GEORGE TOMPKINS

ROGER WADE

TOM WARD

ANITA WASSERMAN

AMANDA WEBSTER

FRED WEIHE

HERBERT WOLF

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Have at least two hundred made. There are reproduction specialists who do this work reasonably (see Appendix). On the back of each Composite, have this vital information mimeographed:

Name and address

Home phone

Telephone exchange (message service)

Social Security number

Entertainment unions of which you are a member

Personal description: height, weight, coloring

Your type and special abilities (dialects, singing, etc.)

Background

List of "Big City" shows you've done

For your radio and other non-visual work, you will also need a set of file cards. These are 3 x 5 inches in size, and should have imprinted on them your picture and essentially the same information as is listed on the back of your composite. For economy's sake, have at least a few hundred printed at a time. You'll be amazed at how quickly they're distributed, especially as shows change directors.

Above, we mentioned the telephone exchange. It is vital to sign with such a service. There are a number of good ones. Their job is handling actors' calls. Customarily, directors and casting agents will call your service when they need to contact you about appointments, jobs, etc. The service relays this message to you

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wherever you are, because you keep them informed of your whereabouts at all times. They have a monthly service fee and charge additionally for all calls made in your behalf. They also issue a Directory for your use, listing agencies, networks, and other employment sources.

If you don't already have membership in the Union covering the branch of entertainment in which you want to work, getting that is your next job. You can not work unless you're a member, and you can not become a member without having a job. Paradox? Not really. As soon as you're hired for your first job, you're automatically eligible to join the Union. For radio and television, the Union is AFTRA, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. You pay an initiation fee, plus quarterly dues based on yearly earnings. If your first jobs are as an extra, you may get a working permit and pay your initiation fee in installments.

For film work, either on camera or "voice-over," you must join SAG, the Screen Actors Guild. Whichever Union you join first is your Parent Union, and as you join others in the industry, you pay them half the initiation fee and half dues. According to a new SAG ruling, any member of AFTRA for six months, in good standing, may join SAG without first getting a film job; this is a great advantage, because it then permits you to avail yourself of any job opportunity in either field.

CHAPTER 3

Directors

THIS MAY come as a shock to a great many people in the profession (especially newcomers), but—*Directors are Human Beings, too!* This is not meant to be facetious, but it is a salient point to remember. In this business, everyone stands in awe of directors. There is, of course, a good reason for this viewpoint. If you tabulate the number of established players, newcomers, union members, personal friends, relatives and political opportunists—all seeking the same job—you will understand the director's need to closet himself in a cubicled tower and arm himself with a Secretary of Defense.

It took me a long time to learn to visualize myself on the other side of the desk. Every performer has one major thought in mind . . . *Get A Job*. He must find employment for economic reasons as well as creative

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ones. During his search for work, he constantly keeps in mind the most important person he knows . . . himself. But, the "most important person" is really the director, because with him rests the final decision on casting. Therefore, the performer should shift his thinking and try to analyze and understand each individual director's needs and problems. The ability to do this is the first step toward a successful career.

There are two types of directors. There is the director who stages or directs the show, and the casting director. Although the functions and duties of each are different, the approach to them is the same. In radio, the director is usually the one who has the final word in casting. In television, casting is a more complicated undertaking. At the present time, the customary procedure is for the producer and the director to hold a conference and decide upon the star and featured players. The Casting Department is then requested to contact these people or their agents for availability and report back. In the featured players category, the Casting Department is usually given two or three names for each part, in order of preference. If the first name is not available, they proceed down the list. In some cases, the casting director will make suggestions when the producer and director are stuck. The problem of casting the small parts and extras is also part of the duties of the casting director, and his powers vary in each organization. The more people that are

acquainted with you and your ability, the more work you will do. For clarity, we shall refer to all people who cast as directors, and any reference to “he” or “him” is meant to include directors of both sexes.

How does one go about understanding directors? There are innumerable ways, and here is where “Creative Imagination” crops up again. Before you attempt to meet a director, try to learn as much about him as possible. And, of course, learn what you can about his show. Information about a director may be obtained by:

- a) asking your fellow performers.
- b) checking write-ups in back issues of your union paper.
- c) talking to his secretary and receptionist.
- d) asking directors you already know, who might know him.

Then take the time to study his show. If it’s radio, listen to it. If it’s television, watch it. Note the format and type of playing. Even musical backgrounds may be a clue to a better understanding of him.

All this information is important before your interview, and more so if you are granted an audition following the interview.

The next step is *Getting the Interview*. It is quite logical to assume that a director will not hire someone he does not know, unless it is through recommendation. For the established player there is also the possibility

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that a director has seen him do an outstanding performance. So, the newcomer seems to have three strikes against him. But if you go about it in the right way, you can overcome the first hurdle by meeting the director. There are two direct approaches. It is your job to discover which is the proper one for each individual director. You can either write or telephone for an appointment. In most cases, you have to do both. The best thing is to write first, then follow up a week later with a phone call. Then, keep phoning until you are granted an appointment. *Never Give Up*. Make your letter brief, as interesting as possible, and phrased to invite attention. Make your approach such, that if you received that letter from another person, you would want to meet him. Before you begin your campaign, investigate thoroughly the method of approach at each network and advertising agency, to each casting office, director or agent. Most of them require a written approach. Never make a nuisance of yourself or antagonize the person you are trying to see. Observe the rules of consideration, but be firm and determined.

Understand that the director may be in rehearsal on one show, reading the script for the next one, discussing sound, design, music, layouts, or costumes with the heads of these departments, and in addition answering dozens of phone calls, solving casting difficulties and attending to numerous small details which are vital to keeping his job. Multiply all this by the number

of actors who want to see him, to get a job from him or just impress him, and you have some idea of why it's so difficult for you to reach him. Some networks require that you pass an audition, before you can meet the directors.

Comes the happy day when you finally get your appointment. Dress for it. Take into consideration all the facts you've learned about him, and wear the right things. Don't try to be arty or outlandish. The first impression he receives as you walk into his office is usually the one that sticks. Just be a lady or a gentleman . . . and most of all, *be yourself*. Present your professional card or composite and elaborate on your background and experience. Be honest. You can't kid a director. No matter what you tell him, the minute you get in front of a microphone or camera, he knows all about you.

Don't go in with preconceived notions you may have heard from others during your investigation of him. If you've heard some disparaging things, forget them. Know that he's a nice person, you're a nice person, and combining your talents you will work harmoniously for your mutual benefit. Don't do all the talking. Listen. He may say something which will be the basis of many future jobs. Don't beg for a job. You don't have to. You are bringing him a talent, which—if he needs it—he will use to his advantage. If you are inexperienced professionally, present yourself as a new

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personality who would be grateful for any opportunity. The “star overnight” routine usually takes ten years or more of work and heartbreak.

You won’t be called by every director you meet, but if you meet enough, you are bound to impress some, and these are the ones who will give you the start you need. The most important purpose of your first interview is to obtain an opportunity for an audition or reading. This is the best method for a director to get to know new talent. You must prove yourself to him. Find out how, and then go about doing it.

Follow up the interview and the audition with “Thank You” notes. These serve two purposes. It is first of all an act of common courtesy to express one’s thanks. In the second place, the note serves as another reminder. Even if the interview apparently had no results, add the director’s name to your mailing list, and inform him every time you are on a show or appearing in even an off-Broadway production.

Secretaries and Receptionists

The second most important group of people in our business are the secretaries. To paraphrase the term, “never underestimate the power of a secretary.” This includes receptionists, too. The primary job of these girls is to keep you away from the person you want to see. That’s part of what they’re paid for. On the other

hand, they can prove to be very good friends and allies. Again I caution. "Put yourself on the other side of the desk." Never be impatient or discourteous to any of these girls, regardless of what their attitude might seem to be. Make friends with them. Get to know them. They can suggest you for a part, or even obtain that "impossible" interview for you. Learn their names. Never make a nuisance of yourself or incur their dislike. You may say: "I'm not that kind of person," but still, you may do something which irritates them in your own zeal to get work.

Directors' Idiosyncrasies

Just as all of us have our idiosyncrasies, so have directors. The difference is that, because of their importance to us, their foibles have an influence on our very livelihood. Learning to understand and cope with them means more work. Here are a few examples which can serve to point up this need.

There was one director who used to have periodic interviews and would ensconce himself behind a large desk, sitting in regal majesty as the aspirants for work came in to pay homage. He had a beard, which came to inspire awe in actors. It took me a long time to realize that that was exactly why he wore it. Every time I went to see him (and the beard didn't stop me) I became tongue-tied in the presence of the great one. One day, a

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fellow actor happened to remark that the bearded one liked funny stories. At the next interview, I summoned up my courage and told him a joke. He honored me with a disdainful smile. The next week, I was called for his show.

Then there's the experience with a network director who opened his own packaging house (that is, he became an independent producer). Being ever on the alert, I hurried over to his office as soon as I got the tip, and was practically the first actor to call on him. We had a very nice interview and from then on, I had him on my list for "the treatment" (see Chapter 7). For five years, I visited his office almost weekly. His secretary was his wife, an extremely lovely and understanding lady. We became good friends. But, I never worked for the office, though they used hundreds of actors. Finally, I could take it no longer. One day, I blurted out the question:

"Mrs. X, please . . . I would appreciate it greatly if you would tell me honestly why, after all these years, and after using hundreds of other actors, your husband has never called me once." I went on to add that it couldn't be because I wasn't a good actor, because I was working for most of the top directors on the top shows, on all networks. I just could not understand.

She looked at me and said: "You really want to know?"

"Yes," I replied, "desperately."

"Well, Mr. Joels," she said, "to tell you the truth, it's 'chemical.' You know how it is . . . some people's chemistry affects other people adversely. It's not a question of your ability. It's just that you and my husband clash chemically."

I was flabbergasted. So I said: "Mrs. X, this I can't fight. I guess I'll have to go out and buy me an A. C. Gilbert Chemical Set and see what I can do to change my microbes." With that, I left. I tried to dismiss it humorously, but actually felt badly, though I realized there was a lesson in it. I never went back again. It was the first time I ever gave up. However, there is a sequel.

One day about a year later, I phoned my service and the operator began giving me a call for the following Sunday.

"Wait a minute," I said, "this is Merrill."

"I know it," she answered.

"But, isn't that one of Mr. X's shows?"

"Yes," came back the answer, "and the call's for you." What's more, I've been working for this director ever since. Guess my chemistry just must have changed!

Sometimes an opening comes because of someone else's poor judgment. When I first started in network radio, took my auditions and finally got to see the directors, one break came in just such a way. I happened to follow an actor who had left the director fuming because of the exaggerated claims on his card. When he looked at mine, the director said:

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"Now this is a good card. It's clear, concise, and doesn't claim you can do everything from baby-cries to ninety-year-olds, like that one does!" As a result, I began to work for him. Directors don't like phonies.

On the other hand, self-effacement is just as harmful as vain boasting. After years of trying to break down a certain director, I finally got a call because all the well-known "doubblers" happened to be unavailable. When I got to the studio, I found myself confronted with the necessity of playing a Chinese Communist general who had been taught English by the Russians. The director was very pleased with my work. Weeks later, an actress friend of mine, and of the director, related in confidence a conversation that had ensued after the broadcast. When the director told her, "That Joels is a terrific actor," she asked: "Then why haven't you been using him before now?"

"Because," he informed her, "he's too nice."

This she could not understand, so he went on: "He comes in to see me and he's so reserved and gentlemanly, I didn't feel he had enough fire. But, he sure proved otherwise!"

The moral is, don't be "too nice." Don't be "too" anything. Be yourself. Let your own personality show.

Then, there's a TV casting director who likes to procrastinate. He has many jobs to give out and enjoys a feeling of power. He likes to have actors call him up two or three days hence, sit and wait for hours while

he's "in conference," or "tied up" . . . raise their hopes, then be "sorry, but it didn't work out." I knew this, but kept after him, accepting all his foibles and playing his game. One day, the show changed directors. Our friend still did the casting, but the new man happened to know my work and requested me. I began to work the show quite regularly. Whereas this casting director previously couldn't see me in any part, he now began to see me in quite a few. Once I had proved myself to him, the picture changed. This is the sort of patience you must acquire.

Here's another example of how things work out in this business. There is an agent who has a very busy office. He is constantly on the phone. The result is that his office is always crowded with performers who wait in an anteroom, outside the locked door. Sometimes they wait for hours before he is free to come and look them over. I went to this office for five years, almost weekly, signed my name, waited until I couldn't take it any longer, then left. Sometimes I saw him, sometimes I didn't. Not once did he send me out on an audition or a job.

One day, the phone rang. It was his wife, who also works in his office. She wanted to know if I could do a twelve-year-old boy's trick voice. I asked her how she'd happened to call me, after assuring her that I could perform the required job. She told me that another actor had suggested me. I went to audition and

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won the part. When I came in to pay the commission, she wanted to find out why they'd never heard of me, why I hadn't registered with them, and why I never came up to see them!

There are many more such experiences, and every professional has dozens of stories. You can see how much patience and understanding you need to stay in this business. I developed a motto which can be used to bolster your courage. I call it: "Outlive 'em." I don't mean this in a physical sense, but rather a sense of time. Sooner or later, directors change on almost every show. This creates a new opportunity. Eventually, you'll break through to the show or director that seemed impossible. Experience, together with what you'll learn from this book, will ultimately open many of the closed doors.

A Few Words of Caution

Be patient. We are in a long-range business. Wait for your interview. Wait for your audition. Constant reminders in good taste are permissible, but don't hound or complain. You will get them eventually. Included in your analysis of the director's problem are many things to bear in mind. According to the present terms of Union contracts, every performer—unless he is in an over-scale bracket—receives the same remuneration. Over-scale includes stars and featured players greatly in demand. Isn't it logical, then, to assume that

a director will try to get the best and most experienced actor for each part? Why should he hire an unknown quantity and pay the same price for which he could get the known? Again, patience pays off. If you are new in the field, you may have to start by playing extras, bits, small parts and work up, commensurate with your increasing experience and abilities. The important thing is to keep working. The "breaks" do come *when you are ready for them!*

There is another unfortunate side to casting which must also be taken into consideration. That is, the insecurity of many directors. In the past, directors usually came out of the theater with many years of background, but due to the theater's ever-diminishing state, directors come in to television these days with much less background and experience. Many become directors as a result of their technical background rather than dramatic know-how. Consequently, many of them have come to rely upon the experience, resourcefulness and initiative of the actor. Even directors with well-founded theatrical backgrounds do not have time to be dramatic teachers. Therefore, it behooves the actor to know his business and be able to prove it, before he can expect the director to pay him for it.

CHAPTER 4

Auditions

DESPITE YOUR background, training and experience, you are an unknown quantity to a director until you have proven yourself to him. He might catch you on a show, or you may be recommended to him, but the traditional way for you to “show” him is by audition.

During the peak of the radio era, it was customary for directors to hold periodic auditions as a means of acquainting themselves with new talent. These auditions were also used as a courtesy or a brush-off. With the present diminution of dramatic radio programs, auditions are very difficult to obtain. They are usually given for a specific role, or as a result of personal interest. They are still important to programs which are *simulcast*; that is, when the radio show is also televised

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and uses the same cast. One must always be prepared for any contingency, including a "special audition."

There are three types of audition material:

- a) original
- b) excerpts from plays and radio scripts
- c) reading material from scripts of the director's current show

Radio auditions should be no more than five minutes in length. Pick four or five selections, none over a minute. Have one "straight," one emotional, one comedy and at least one character. The material should be tailored to fit the type of show done by the auditioning director. If the show uses dialects and doubles, plan your selections accordingly. Remember, each director buys talent according to his particular needs. That's one reason why we're not used by every director for whom we audition. Some actors sell versatility, others have one outstanding quality, which they adapt to each part. Discover your best category and present your material in line with it. Original material is best, but you must then have writing ability or have it written for you. If this is not feasible, select material from a play, picking the type of part for which you might be cast. Possibly you may have scenes from plays you have done. If you can manage to get hold of some radio scripts that have been broadcast, you may also find suitable material there.

AUDITIONS

Scenes from plays should actually be your last resort, because in all probability, the director has heard that same scene before; in some cases (the telephone scene from *Front Page*, for example) he has heard it a hundred times. Possibly, he has even seen the play on Broadway, and your performance could easily suffer by comparison. You will find all the material you need at the Public Library. In New York's 58th Street Library, the branch near Lexington Avenue, there is a very finely categorized file to aid you. Sometimes, scenes from a good novel can provide you with material, too.

The main difficulty with doing material from the director's current show is that often you have to read it "cold," that is, at sight. This requires a great deal of experience and the ability to assume a complete character at first reading. If you find yourself in this position, don't hesitate to question the director and make sure you know what he's looking for before you begin to read.

The same rules apply for television auditions, plus the memorization of your material, use of body movement and facial expressions. Auditions are granted by network casting departments on the basis of experience. You must write or apply in person for an audition application, fill it out and wait until you are called. There are so many applicants, that it sometimes takes months. At the audition, make certain to leave your composite. You are usually permitted to bring someone to play

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opposite you. A television audition differs from radio, because you may use your full five minutes to play one scene.

Bear in mind that any director who knows his business can usually tell all about you after the first minute of your audition. Open at your best. Don't take an audition unless you're ready for it. That was one of the main reasons I flunked out when I started. Careful selection and preparation of your material can make a great difference in your career.

Dress carefully, display confidence, be friendly and have enough showmanship to leave a good impression. Follow up the audition with a "Thank You" note.

Specialization and Versatility

IN BLUEPRINTING the development of your career, you must make a careful and unbiased analysis of yourself. Vocally, for radio. Physically, for television. Today, the entire system of casting is based on definite "type." Regardless of your experience or ability, "type" is the first consideration. Even in radio, where the voice should be the most important element, your physical appearance often affects the type of parts you are given. Therefore, you must be *sure* of your own category. Generally, "type" is broken down into five classifications:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| 1) Leading Men-Women | (Romantic) |
| 2) Juvenile-Ingenué | (Romantic) |
| 3) Leading Men-Women | (Comedy) |
| 4) Juvenile-Ingenué | (Comedy) |
| 5) Character Men-Women | |

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The "Character Men-Women" category is then broken down into:

- a) Age Groups
- b) Types (Business, Society, White-collar, Toughs, etc.)
- c) Nationality

For radio, if you are a Leading Man or Woman type and do just Romantic leads, your problem is comparatively difficult (as to competition from established players), yet simple in that it is uncomplicated. In the other groups, even though you may be cast "to type," you may also be required to do "dialect parts" or "doubles." "Doubling" means that an actor is explicitly doing two different roles, each very specifically calling for different vocal qualities. By union ruling, only two actors are allowed to "double" on any one show, except a documentary program.

Some actors specialize in selling one "quality," a particular type of tone and diction that directors will buy and use in many roles. Others must sell "versatility"—the ability to do a variety of characters—because they don't have that elusive "quality." If you find yourself in the latter group, you must work diligently to perfect your "doubles" and "dialects." There are reputable schools and teachers for this purpose. Also, there are good books which you can buy, or borrow from the Library. A tape-recording machine for practice is an absolute necessity.

SPECIALIZATION AND VERSATILITY

In my own case, I soon discovered that I didn't have that "one-quality" appeal. I determined to develop my versatility. I took classes and worked hard. With the aid of my tape machine, I found out I could make many sounds I never thought I could do. Besides dialects, I worked on animal sounds. In due time, a director who was stuck had the idea of asking me if I could do a large dog's voice. I told him I could, and found myself playing the title role in the Sherlock Holmes story, *Hound of the Baskervilles*! Another time I was engaged for a television series titled the *Children's Sketchbook*, doing off-camera voices of animals, pixies, and inanimate objects. When I brought home the first script, I looked at my wife with consternation and asked:

"How do I do three puppies chasing each other around a room, and how do I play a stocking that talks?"

With the aid of my trusty tape machine, I worked it out and enjoyed a long run on the show. I point out these incidents to stress the need for preparation and work, before one can achieve recognition and success, and also to demonstrate that you can do almost anything you're asked, when you really want to.

Your audition must be the final summation of what you are selling. The listening director must be able to put you in a "category," by the time the audition is over.

For television, you must be sure of your physical

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category. Again, if you are a Romantic Lead, your problem is in a sense simplified; but in any other group you will find that each director sees you for something different. To one you may be a "Good" type (in the spiritual sense); to another, a "Bad." One may see you as "Society," another as a "Common" type. Select your best possible selling type and work around it. If you are not a "one type" individual, then—using your strongest selling type—prepare your audition and composite around it, and support that one with the next two or three types that you do well and suit physically.

The performer with the "one type" look may have a simpler problem, but his "performing life" in television is shorter and more limited. We must, of course, adjust our type as we develop and age. Robert Burns' sage advice was never more true or important than it is today in our business: "Oh, would the Lord the giftie gie us, tae see oursel's as others see us."

If you decide to sell a particular type, then always affect the proper clothing and accessories needed to convey and accentuate it. This applies to your "making the rounds" as well as interviews and social engagements.

The way you handle this problem can mean a quicker, surer road to success. Be certain that you give it all due consideration and study.

CHAPTER 6

Obtaining Experience

THE NUMBER ONE question asked of newcomers is: "What have you done?" The years of background, the more you've "done," the better your chances. Even though out-of-town experience seems to count for little in the "Big City," (aside from work with top stock companies) still it is invaluable as a training ground. As many experts have said, one has to have some place to make mistakes, and experience teaches that it is best to have made them before trying for the "Big Time."

Let's see how you can get experience out of town:

- a) School Plays
- b) High School and College Dramatic Workshops
- c) Church Groups
- d) Community Theaters
- e) Local Stock Companies
- f) Local Radio and/or Television Stations

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Of all the above, the Community Theater is the most valuable as a starter. The more you learn about the various facets of your business, the greater your understanding. Your local community theater may well be the basis upon which to build your career. Even though it is now almost as difficult to break into local radio and television as into the "Big Time," it can be done; in fact, should be done. Otherwise, how are you going to combat the competition in the major drama centers? With the mushrooming of new television stations all over the country, your opportunities increase. Concentrate on this area of work, if at all possible.

Let's assume you've served your apprenticeship in all or most of the out-of-town media, and you feel ready to take the plunge. The "Big City" offers many opportunities.

In New York today, "off-Broadway" groups are contributing greatly to the entire entertainment field. There are many such organizations and they are looking for good talent. Many of these groups are non-remunerative, but some have special arrangements with Actors' Equity Association and pay a token salary. Broadway producers have found in these companies performers worthy of star billing.

Equity Library Theater, a project of Actors' Equity, has made a wonderful contribution as a showcase for lesser known performers. Primarily, casts are drawn from the Equity membership, but they do accept a per-

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centage of non-Equity players for smaller roles.

During my first year in New York, I was asked to play the role of "Firs" (an 80-year-old caretaker) in an Equity Library Theater production of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. I knew it was a small part and one for which I'd hardly be cast on Broadway, but it was a display-opportunity.

About a week after the performances were over, I stopped by to see Miss Frances Scott, one of the directors of the Basch Radio and Television Company. As always, she was cordial and interested, and asked about my current activity. I told her about the E.L.T. play. She looked at me incredulously and, with a note of cynicism in her voice, said: "Oh, really, I happened to see that show. What part did you play?"

When I told her it was the octogenarian caretaker, her jaw dropped. She had been tremendously impressed with my performance and makeup.

Six months later, the Basch Company was casting for two characters to do the commercial on the *Bonny Maid Show*. Their names were to be "Wear and Tear." Miss Scott remembered the E.L.T. performance and called me to audition for the sponsors, raved about my ability to do characterization, and sold me to them for a job that lasted three years.

This is but one example of the importance of being seen.

Sometimes, if the play and part are right, it is even

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a good idea to work with a Church Group or Community Service Group. Not long ago, a Christopher Fry play was presented at the Broadway Tabernacle and attracted the attention of some of New York's leading theater critics and commentators.

One of the best places to obtain experience and instruction—and at the same time meet the top Directors in the profession—is the American Theater Wing Professional Training Program. This school charges tuition and is run on a professional basis. The faculty consists of all top people in the theatrical field. There are courses in radio and television acting as well as theater, dancing, singing, fencing and all the kindred arts. In addition, they have showcase performances attended by the very people an unknown performer needs to meet.

Notifying the networks of your availability for extra work (sometimes called a “walk-on”) may also open a few doors.

There are play-reading groups, such as the New Dramatists Workshop, Dramatists' Forum and others, which have public and private readings. Participation adds to your experience and the possibility of being seen or heard by someone in a position to do casting.

Whenever you do anything of a showcase nature, be sure to notify all your casting contacts.

During the course of obtaining experience, you will meet many people who have similar interests. Friend-

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ships are formed and sometimes—years later—these friendships may even develop into job resources, either by recommendation or because someone you've met is put into a position to cast actors. This might easily be misunderstood, so let me explain. I do not mean that we deliberately make friends with the hope of "using" them in the future. Friendships are formed in every phase of life and business; they are not formed for ulterior motives. In our business, friends do help each other by giving them "tips" about casting, and also by recommending one another when the opportunity presents itself. Sometimes, it may even work in reverse. A recommendation can prove to be the "kiss of death," if made by the wrong person. Sometimes these friendships come under the heading of "knowing the right people." My advice is to be friendly and like everyone, and don't let the thought of benefits now or in the future color the making of friends. The more friends you have and the more you give to those relationships, the more you'll get. And that's what counts.

CHAPTER 7

Promotion

LET'S REFER again to the process of "going into business," also discussed in the Introduction. You have picked your location, you've taken care of your fixtures (composites), your display is ready (wardrobe), your telephone is installed (message service), your merchandise is up-to-date (experience and ability). Now you're ready for business. There's one more item to consider—your competition. All along the street, on both sides, everyone is selling something. How do you attract your share of customers?

When you first enter a city or a business, you're unknown. Obviously, your first order of procedure is to become known. A few methods of tackling the situation are discussed in the following sections.

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Mailing List

It is most important to develop and maintain an up-to-date mailing list. It should contain the names, addresses and phone numbers of all directors and casting directors at advertising agencies, radio and television stations, as well as other individuals situated in any employment capacity in the field (there will be a detailed discussion of these other employment capacities in the next chapter). As you progress, you will find your list constantly growing . . . and changing. Keep it current always, because personnel shifts occur almost daily in one phase of the industry or another. Your first source of names can be obtained from the directory furnished by your message service. Other names are available from Casting Directories issued by the professional Directories service.

A mailing list is more effective if you've been able to contact each person individually before you start sending out your publicity. Try to contact them by phone if you can not get in to see them. Even if you can't reach them, it's still wise to keep them posted on your activities. You will meet most of them, eventually, and by the time you do, they will have heard of you and will know something about what you've been "doing."

Cards

Have at least 2,000 cards printed by the most reasonable printer you can find. The card should be of an outstanding color and should have imprinted upon it your picture, your name, telephone service number and the information on the sample card, as shown on the opposite page. Send these to your entire mailing list every time you do a show.

At the same time, have another 2,000 cards made up, in another color, imprinted with just your picture, name and telephone service number. The rest of the card is for messages. These "reminder" cards should be sent regularly to the people on your list. It is with these cards that you begin to put your "Creative Imagination" to work. What you write is important. Make it topical, not too personal, clever and witty if possible and preferably something to induce a smile. If you have drawing ability, try cartoons every now and then. Originality is important. Mail cards at least every other week.

Sometimes, a special campaign helps. For instance, one time I selected a group of directors and saturated them with cards. One agency director responded with this call:

"Merrill, I'm up to my ears in your cards. Come on over and read a commercial for me." As a result, I got to do a series of commercials that proved very lucrative.

This is a call from



Merrill E. Goels

MU 8-6600

Demand "De MAN in DeMANd"

Merrill E. Goels



MU 8-6600

CATCH ME

TV— Station—

Radio— Date—

Film— Time—

Stage— Channel—

Play—

Part—

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There is a danger of overdoing this. I heard, via the grapevine, that one of the directors did not like receiving so many cards. I stopped at once. This is an exception. You must use your own judgment.

Since my advent into the business, I have sent over 15,000 cards. That represents a great deal of work, and though I can't trace many calls directly from them, it still means that my name and picture were seen 15,000 times and more.

Notes

In the course of making rounds, you don't get to see everyone. When you can't see some individual, *leave a note*. For this purpose, have a number of note pads made up by your printer. On the note paper, have your name, your telephone service number—and if possible, your picture—imprinted. If you like, have the words, "Memo from" printed on the sheet, too. Have the pads made up in vari-colored paper. If they're all done in a single color, after a while the director or his secretary will become so familiar with your notes, they may not bother to read them.

Employ the same "Creative Imagination" when writing your notes. Try to tie in the name of the show, the hobby of the director, a performance you're going to do and haven't been able to get cards out on, even

just a friendly "Hello." Anything that will make you live in his memory.

I have written more than 10,000 such notes. Again, I can trace very few calls directly to them, but the 10,000 notes and the 15,000 cards add up to 25,000 reminders about me that have helped to keep me from being an unknown.

There are cases in which a note *has* resulted in a direct call. I had been calling on Mr. Henry Denker for years, without results. Mr. Denker writes and directs one of the finest radio shows on the air, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Over the years, he has established a "stable" of fine actors from among whom he could cast almost every role. Many actors, like myself, were trying to become members of that group, but it seemed almost impossible. Mr. Denker had told me that he'd like to have me on the show, and that perhaps one day he would. That day seemed as far off after five years of calls, as it did after the first visit. One afternoon, I left him a note which read: "It seems to me that the *Greatest Story Ever Told* is the one you told me when you said you'd use me." The very next day, I received a call for the show and have been working for him, on and off, ever since.

Gimmicks

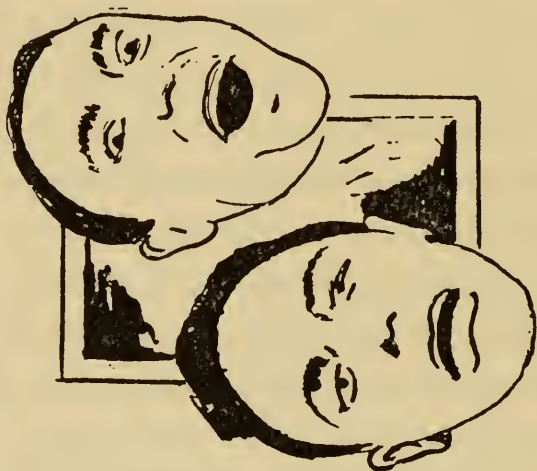
After I had been in New York about three years,

To: _____

EDDIE WRAGGE

Voice Range
15—30

—
Radio Registry



MERRILL E. JOELS

Voice Range
30—50

—
PLaza 7-0700

For Colorful Performances

We Can't Be Licked!

"GAG-OF-THE-MONTH" CLUB

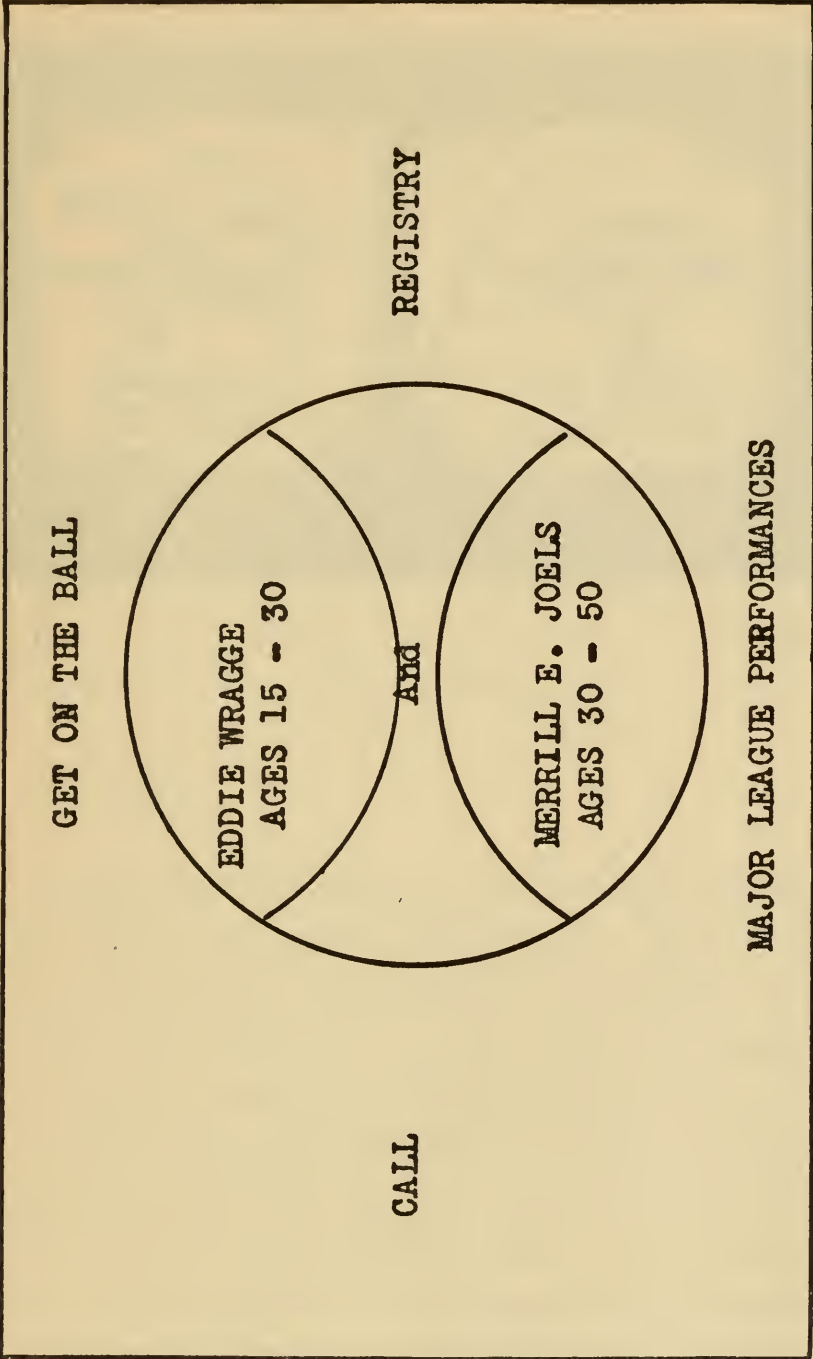
Eddie Wragge and I conceived of the notion of starting a "Gag of the Month" club. We printed up membership cards with a space for each director's name. They were all automatically elected to membership . . . by us. Each month, we would select a provocative gimmick and leave it at their offices with an appropriate card. We became the talk of the industry. John Crosby of the New York *Herald-Tribune* and the editors of the radio section of *Variety* included stories about it in their columns. We presented them with giant multicolored lollipops (for colorful performances); baby cactus plants (needling them for work); baseball-bat-shaped cigarette lighters (they'd bat .1000 if they used us); an enormous pair of dice with our names and telephone service numbers (they'd take no chances, hiring us); and our final item was an insurance policy guaranteeing them everything they could wish for in an actor, if they used us.

Among other things, I also gave away cartons of book-matches with my name, picture and phone service number imprinted. Other actors distribute pencils personalized with their names, also blotters, desk calendars, etc. In other words, any bright idea that will amuse, impress and awaken directors to the fact that you're around and available, is valuable to your establishment.

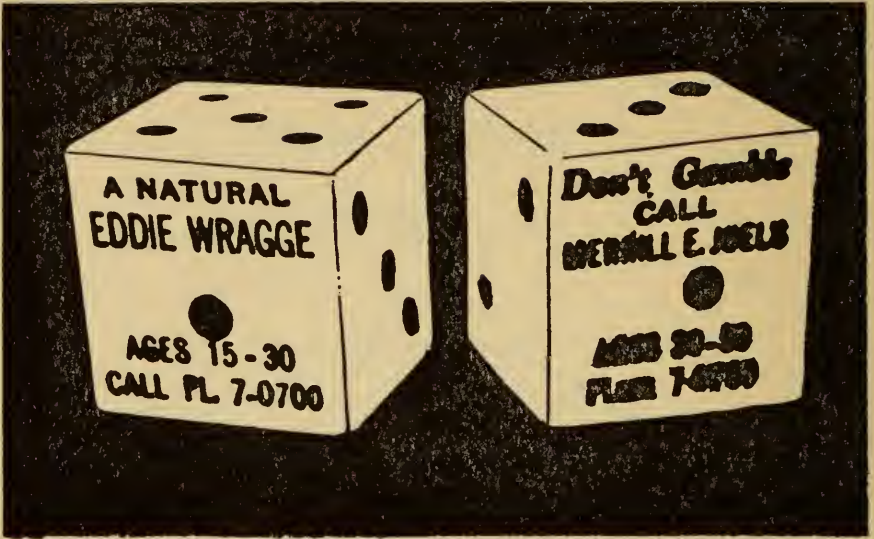
GO TO BAT FOR US AND MAKE
YOUR CASTING PROBLEMS
"LIGHTER"



EDDIE WRAGGE -- MERRILL E. JOELS



ACTING IS A BUSINESS



Telephone Campaign

After you have met or worked for a director, you can also contact him by phone. This is an effective way of reminding him of you. In most instances, you will probably reach only his secretary, but if you impress upon her your name and your personality, she will convey your message and your purpose will be accomplished. As you become better known or as your friendships grow, you will be able to reach a greater number of people directly. Either way, it's a good investment. A telephone campaign can save you miles of walking and hours of traveling time. But—don't let it replace the personal contact system altogether!

Publicity

Papers that specialize in news about the entertainment industry are called "trade papers." Most of them have personal-item columns about the activities of performers. The editors are usually eager and interested in having news about you. Make it a point to meet them personally. Remember, though, that they're interested only in bona-fide items, such as the shows you're doing, what new running part you've won, or any other event which might interest other members of the industry.

Whenever anything interesting does happen, let

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everyone know. For example, births and marriages are newsworthy. If you can get into the popular columns in the daily papers, all the better. Your main task is to let as many people as possible know about you. It's easier than you think, if you'll just use your "Creative Imagination." Keep contact with your home-town papers and let them know of your activities from time to time.

As soon as you're financially able, it's a wise investment to publicize yourself with periodic inserts of your "straight" picture in the trade papers. This is expensive, but has value as a prestige-builder. These ads are known as institutional advertising. You'd advertise your imaginary shoe business in the newspaper; you must do the same with your show business.

One of the most important and reasonable media for displaying your picture and background credits is the *Players Guide*. This is an annual publication of Actors Equity Association and is the Bible of casting directors. Almost everyone in the profession is included. It is the most widely distributed and read book in our industry.

Keep all your publicity in a scrap-book. You'll want it as a record of your programs and progress. It will serve as an aid in impressing a prospective employer.

Then, of course, there's the professional publicity man whom you may employ to do the job for you. They

are quite expensive and generally can do very little for an unknown. By the time you can afford one, you won't need him, except as a luxury and tax-reduction item.

Circulars

Just as you would distribute circulars to build up your business, you can use the same method to benefit your career. Using your mailing list, you should distribute periodically a well-planned circular or booklet illustrating your progress up to that point. Offset printing is the most reasonable. Make it a colorful, attractive account of your accomplishments and capabilities, and use photographs and/or cartoons to illustrate it. A new issue every two years is a good idea. There are at least 500 sources of employment, to which you may mail them.

In summation, I must quote the old bromide that "you have to spend money to make money." Spend at least 10% of your total yearly income on your publicity campaign. It is tax-deductible. You're a "somebody" only if, when your name is mentioned, it is recognized. It is your responsibility to make certain that everyone in the industry knows about you. Until you become a "star," you'll have to devote a lot of time, money and effort on your own publicity.

Build your name. With "Creative Imagination," the above suggestions and the constant application of what

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I call the "Chinese Water Torture System," you can do it. You may have read how the ancient Chinese used to make their prisoners respond by placing a container of water over their heads and allowing the water to drip on them, one drop at a time. I realize this is a rather crude comparison, but enough drops of water can wear away the largest obstacle. I merely use it as a metaphor to show you the importance of building your name systematically.

CHAPTER 8

Development of Earning Power

IN A RECENT analysis made by the radio and television performers' Union, the facts revealed were quite disheartening and alarming. The average yearly earnings of the membership were broken down approximately into the following categories:

80% of the members earned \$2,000 or less

10% of the members earned up to \$5,000

5% of the members earned up to \$10,000

3% of the members earned up to \$20,000

2% of the members earned up to \$50,000

Naturally, there are a great many reasons for the majority to be found in the lower-income bracket. Your problem is to reach a higher bracket. This can be done

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with the proper amount of effort, time, experience and so-called "breaks." Because of the competition (there are over 10,000 members in the Union as of this printing), many performers find it extremely difficult to stay in the running, financially. They turn to part-time jobs, such as selling, waiting on table, secretarial work, etc. These are helpful as a supplement to the bank account while you make the rounds. But what most performers overlook are the opportunities all around them in correlated fields. Here the earning power is even better than in the non-professional fields. In the sections that follow there are outlined a few ways to supplement your income and still work in your business.

Modeling

All of us are "types." Modeling isn't necessarily limited to the handsome young man or beautiful girl. All kinds of types are needed for commercial photography, magazine illustrations, billboards and posters. There are good agents to direct you to the proper places to distribute your composites. Modeling pays from \$15.00 to \$25.00 an hour.

Modeling agencies require a different type of composite from actors' agents. They prefer simpler composites for the fashion model. If you are a fashion model type, your composite should include one full-length picture and three or four half-length pictures showing

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you wearing the type of clothes usually seen in fashion magazines and ads. If you are a specific type (collegiate, sports or sophisticated), stress that particular quality in your composite. If your type is more suitable for magazine illustrations, your regular acting composite will serve as your presentation.

Slide Films and Industrial Films

There are many companies which specialize in the production of training and sales films for industry. They use models and actors for the visual roles, and narrators and actors for the voice-over-film portions. This field pays well. Some companies hire through agents, others directly. It's important that they have your composite and resume of your background. Investigate this field thoroughly and make sure they know you're available.

Commercials

This is one of the busiest, most important and lucrative fields today. In order to work on filmed commercials, you must be a member of the Screen Actors' Guild, known as SAG. If you've been a member of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) for six months or more, you may, upon payment of half the initiation fee and half dues become a

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member of SAG. This gives you the privilege of working in the filmed commercial field, as well as being able to accept other work in films. Your SAG membership opens up a completely new source of income—in commercials, both those you do on screen plus voice, on screen silent, or just voice-over-picture. Each pays accordingly and you should familiarize yourself with the rates by studying the SAG Agreement Contract with Producers.

Live commercials are under AFTRA's jurisdiction. They are more difficult to do, because once a mistake is made, it can not be corrected on the air. Sponsors insist that their commercials must be presented word for word. Using a wrong word or phrase could lead to serious consequences for the sponsor. Today it is common practice to use cards with the copy completely written out and held next to the camera by the floor-manager. The safest method is the use of a Teleprompter attached to the camera. The Teleprompter is an electrically controlled revolving paper roll, with the commercial copy imprinted in large, legible type and controlled remotely by an engineer, who synchronizes it with the performer's speech. The live commercial field is highly specialized and requires a particular technique to be able to look straight into a camera lens, and create the impression of speaking directly to the viewer.

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Dubbing

There are a number of companies that specialize in dubbing American voices on foreign films. This is difficult work, requiring expert timing and precision along with your acting ability. It is an excellent way to earn good fees, if your capabilities qualify you. This work also requires SAG membership.

Teaching

Specialists in radio and television acting who can teach are often needed by established schools. If you have sufficient background and experience and can convey your ideas well, you can earn from \$3.00 to \$5.00 an hour, on a part-time basis.

Stand-Ins

In radio and television work, many busy actors have occasions when rehearsal-times on two shows conflict. In such cases, having obtained permission from one of the directors involved, they hire another actor as a "stand-in" at one of the rehearsals for the conflict period. Such work pays hourly union scale rates, gives you an opportunity to meet the director and adds to your experience. Many of the "give-away" and panel shows

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also employ stand-ins. They are used to facilitate rehearsals by impersonating contestants.

One of the biggest thrills of my career came as a result of doing a stand-in when I was quite new in the business. One morning, I received a call from my service to rush over to the Vanderbilt Theater immediately. When I arrived, I found it was a rehearsal of *Angel Street* for *Theatre Guild of the Air*. It seemed that Leo G. Carroll, who was to play the "Sergeant," was unable to be there and I found myself at the microphone playing his part opposite Helen Hayes! Right in the middle of the rehearsal, Victor Jory—who was playing "Mr. Manningham"—had to leave for another show, and I took over his part, too. There I was, playing two parts and talking to myself in both characters, opposite the First Lady of the Theater. It was a wonderful experience.

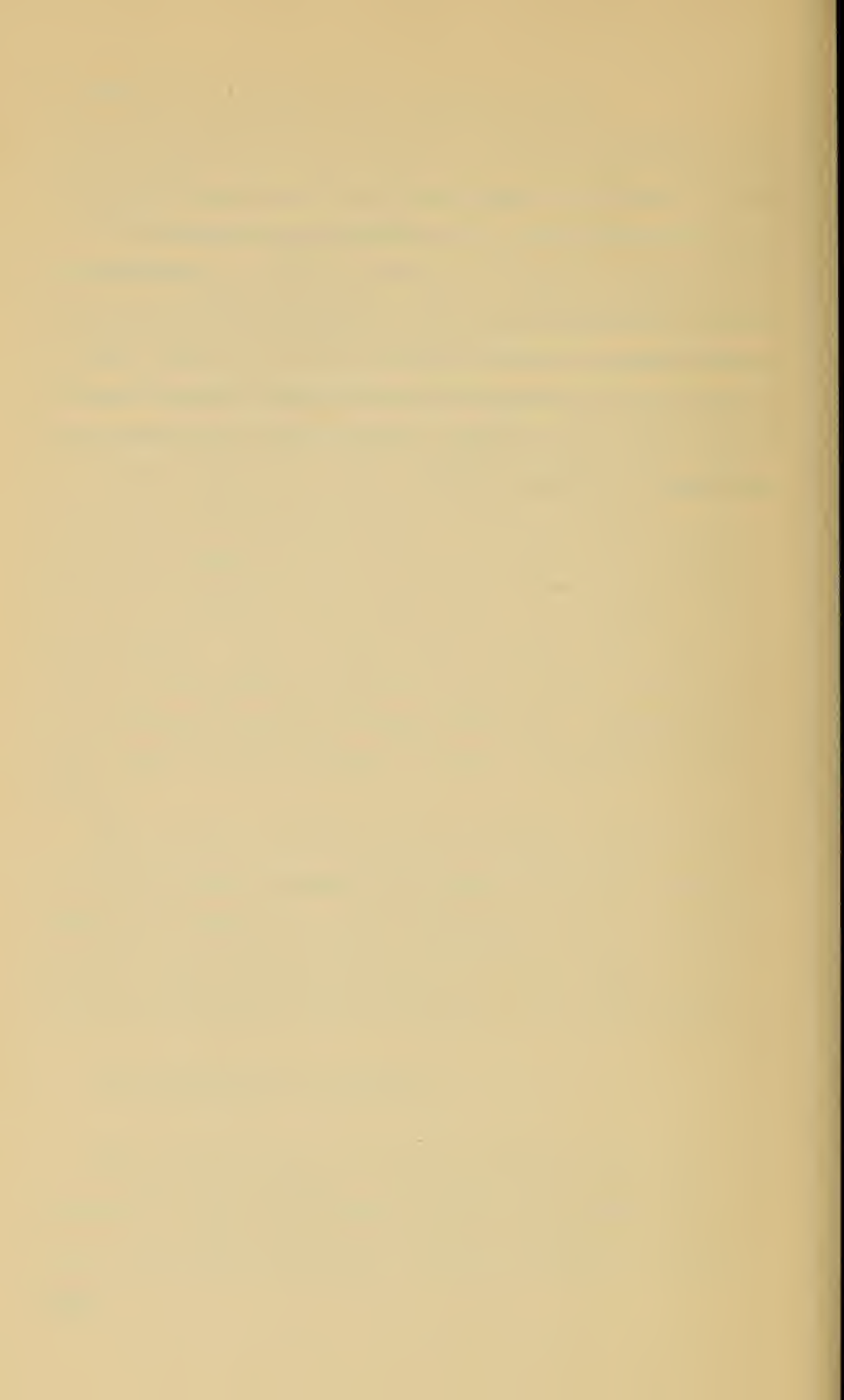
The sources of these income-adders may be obtained from your classified telephone Directory, casting directories issued by your telephone service, casting directories published by specialists in this field; in addition, you often get such information from fellow-actors.

Unemployment Insurance

This really is not an "earning power," but rather a result of it. You should know about it and take advantage of it, when necessary. You are entitled to unem-

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ployment insurance. It is not a form of charity. You and your employers are paying for it, anyway. Depending on the amount of your earnings, you are entitled to amounts up to \$30.00 a week for twenty-six weeks annually, if during the year just ended you have worked twenty weeks or more. Register for it in a given year as soon as you've completed those twenty weeks. In our business, one job, whether it lasts a day or a week, is considered a working week.



CHAPTER 9

Aids That Make It Easier

NOW YOU'VE distributed your composites and arranged for telephone service. You're meeting directors and taking auditions. Your experience is growing and you follow through with promotion. There's a lot to do, isn't there?

To do the job systematically, buy yourself a large "Daily Aid" book at a stationery or variety store for about a dollar. Keep an accurate account of appointments, jobs and rounds. If you're going to make rounds, plan your day's itinerary before leaving in the morning and try to stick to it.

Today, a brief-case or portfolio is an essential part of an actor's wardrobe. In it you keep your "Daily Aid" book and a supply of composites and cards. Wear good

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sensible shoes. You'll do a lot of walking from one office to another.

Keep in touch with your telephone service as often as possible. There are free phone connections at all networks for the major services. If you miss one call, you might easily lose a lot more than your service costs for an entire year!

Maintain a complete bookkeeping system. Make a record of every job you get. List the name of the show, the date, the director, the role you play and the fee. You might also list the network or agency and the sponsor, if the show is commercial. Purchase a file box and faithfully file all bills paid, all check memoranda, correspondence, contracts and other data having to do with your business.

Buy a four-column ledger for bookkeeping in any stationery store and in it, note all income and expenditures.

The income section should be subdivided thus: gross income, withholding tax, Social Security, disability tax and net income. At the end of the year, have a competent theatrical accountant compute your tax. He can save you many dollars, on legal deductions of which you may not be aware.

Have a small name-stamp made with your name and telephone service number on it. They come in their own little carrying case. Many offices have a daily rec-

ord book on which actors leave their names and your stamp will save you from writer's cramp. Also, it's distinctive and easy to read.

If you meet an experienced actor who doesn't mind your tagging along, try to make rounds with him occasionally. You'll discover sources and contacts you didn't know about, and may meet a lot of new casting people.

Your fellow-performers are an important source of information. If you know of something that will benefit a non-competitor, give him the tip. He, in return, will usually repay you in kind.

The important point is to make the rounds every day and keep going. Activity breeds activity. You don't get work without going after it. There are things to do at home, like bookkeeping, mailing cards, telephoning and working out promotional ideas. Do them at times that won't interfere with round-making. The basic means of employment is *meeting people who hire actors* and keeping them aware of you. As your reputation grows, you'll find it easier. You'll receive more calls and won't have to "plug" as hard. But during the early days of getting established, your most vital job is to let people know that you're around and available!

You formulate your "rounds" plan from various sources. In addition to those previously mentioned, there is a list in your union newspaper giving the names

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of all current radio and television shows and their directors. Trade papers, such as "Variety," "Radio and TV Daily," "Show Business" and "Ross Report" help keep you informed on what's going on, and whom to see. If you can't afford to buy all these, you can usually read them at the Public Library.

Agents

In Hollywood, most actors depend solely upon agents. Everything is so widely separated, that it's almost impossible to do your own leg-work. But the situation in New York is quite different. There are a great many agents franchised by the various unions. Some do general casting, others specialize in personal representation. It is not necessary to have an agent for the average job if you do your own leg-work. You must avail yourself of all possible employment services in the industry. Sometimes, agents have shows for which they do all the casting. In these cases, you would have to work through them. Usually, in working through an agent, you would be contacting a general casting agent, since personal representatives handle only performers who receive over scale, that is, more than union minimum. They receive a larger commission, but in turn have to guarantee their clients a definite amount of work.

The general casting agent operates in all entertainment fields. He gets a 10% commission on all overscale jobs in radio and television. There is an AFTRA ruling specifying that no commission is to be paid on a job paying scale. SAG's ruling is that an agent may collect commission on any job paying \$70 or over that comes under SAG jurisdiction. The agent is your friend. Pay him his commission as soon as you get your check. Agents have to live, too.

Agents must know your work before they can recommend you. Showcase performances are invaluable as a means of being seen in action by agents. If an agent you haven't met is at one of these performances, send him a card listing all your background and abilities. Get to know these agents personally. See to it that each one has your composite. Put them on your mailing list.

Finally, socializing in the proper places can help, too. It's good to be seen by directors and fellow actors in the places they patronize. This doesn't mean necessarily that every such "appearance" will mean a job, but it helps put you "in the swim." In New York, many radio and television Directors and performers like to lunch at Colbee's, in the Columbia Broadcasting System Building on Madison Avenue, and at the Cromwell Drug Store in the RCA Building (where the National Broadcasting Company is located). Some other favorite

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haunts are: Cherio's, Louis and Armand's, Toots Shor's, the various Radio City restaurants and eating places near the different television studios.

Occasionally, the unions hold benefit dances and parties. They're fun to attend and are good meeting spots.

CHAPTER 10

Faith and Ideas

IN A business like ours, with its many intangibles, one must have something to hold to and believe in. Contrary to popular conception, many actors turn to God for their needs. It is well established that many people with little conscious religious feeling turn to God in emergencies and appeal to Him for help. Actors need help all the time.

It is not my intent, nor the purpose of this book, to preach or proselytize. I merely base my observations on personal experience. We need faith—faith in ourselves, our ability, our fellow man. That's why turning to the greatest Source of Faith is the most healthy move we can make toward helping ourselves.

When making the rounds, taking auditions, waiting for calls and seemingly standing still, it's a wonderful comfort to have someone to turn to for the courage you

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need. So many have tried and failed because they lacked the courage to go on. Whatever your denomination, you will find all your problems easier to solve, with God's help.

From Him come all ideas. In our chapter on PROMOTION, I stressed the need for originality, cleverness, unique touches and so on, in presenting yourself and your talents to the right people. By turning to God, you will reap more than enough inspiration and ideas from His infinite Source.

There are so many negative beliefs held by people in and about the theatrical profession, that one needs an antidote against them. There's the belief concerning seasonal employment; the belief that work comes "in bunches" followed by gaps of weeks of unemployment; the belief that only personal influence gets you places; the belief that it's all a matter of "breaks"; beliefs about envy and jealousy; a myriad of negative ideas that one can fall heir to if not on guard against them.

Such notions are only true if you believe them so. Therefore, *don't you believe them!* Remember: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Finally, I say to you, try to find your happiness and success where you are, but if you feel you must try the "Big Time", come ahead. Let your spiritual conscience be your guide.

APPENDIX

Some Sources and Services in New York

YOUR GREATEST resource for almost anything you'll need is the Classified Telephone Directory. If anything, it's like a portable "office". Below is a list of other sources I have used, people, services and places about which I know and which I think will help you get started in New York. There are many more.

WHERE TO FIND:

AUDITION MATERIAL

New York Public Library
(58th Street Branch)
127 East 58th Street

Drama Book Shop, Inc.
48 West 52nd Street

"Scenes for Student Actors"
by Frances Cosgrove

COMPOSITE DUPLICATORS

Atlas Photo Service
240 West 23rd Street

APPENDIX

Photo Service Company
145 West 45th Street

Zenith Press
122 West 26th Street

DIALECT BOOKS

Manual of Foreign Dialects
by Louis and Marguerite
Hermann

Manual of American Dialects
by Louis and Marguerite
Hermann

DIRECTORIES

Ross Reports
551 Fifth Avenue

Show Business
155 West 46th Street (and on news stands)

CASTING GUIDE
Published by Show Business. On news stands.

EATING PLACES

COLBEE'S
34 East 52nd Street

CROMWELL DRUG COMPANY
RCA BUILDING
30 Rockefeller Plaza

CHERIO'S
46 East 50th Street

LOUIS AND ARMAND'S
42 East 52nd Street

TOOTS SHOR'S
51 WEST 51st Street

MIMEOGRAPHING

Hart Stenographic Bureau
156 West 44th Street

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Cecil Clovelly
120 West 11th Street

Kerr Associates
150 West 46th Street

PRINTERS

Record Printing Company
66 West 53rd Street

RUBBER STAMPS
Victor Schelsinger
201 West 49th Street

SCHOOLS

American Theater Wing
351 West 48th Street

Alfred Dixon
109 East 39th Street

TELEPHONE SERVICES

ARTISTS' SERVICE
2039 Broadway

APPENDIX

HAYES REGISTRY

155 West 46th Street

RADIO REGISTRY

38 West 53rd Street

TELEPHONE SERVICE

595 Fifth Avenue

(entrance around the corner on 48th Street)

TRADE PAPERS

Billboard

1564 Broadway

Show Business

155 West 46th Street

Radio and TV Daily

1545 Broadway

Variety

154 West 46th Street

UNIONS

Actors Equity Association (AEA)

45 West 47th Street NYC 36

American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
(AFTRA)

15 West 44th Street NYC 36

Screen Actors Guild (SAG)

551 Fifth Avenue NYC 17





University of
Connecticut
Libraries

L. CROSS LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

